

Detail, looking south: *Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio* - Augustus Koch, 1873

Site History

Pre-HemisFair Neighborhood Site

Actions Leading Up to HemisFair

Significance of HemisFair to San Antonio

Post-HemisFair Actions

Map
No. 2 - Buildings by Era

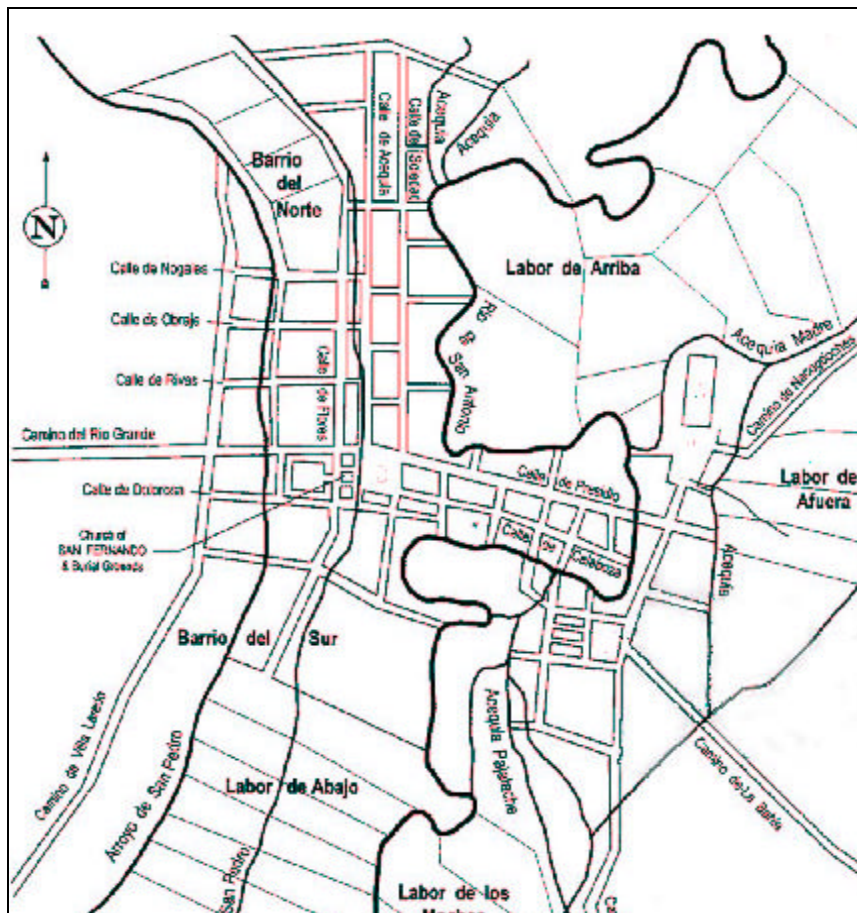
Table
No. 1 - HemisFair Site Index

Pre-HemisFair Neighborhood Site

The HemisFair Park area was originally comprised of farmlands from the Mission San Antonio de Valero, which was founded in 1718, and in 1719, moved near its present location. The primary irrigation ditch, the Acequia Madre, was built at the same time, to provide water for the mission occupants as well as the mission fields. A portion of this acequia flows through the current HemisFair grounds area.

Early routes of trade and transportation traverse HemisFair. One of the earliest is the Camino Real de la Bahia, known as Goliad Road. This old road formed the route from San Antonio de Bexar to Mission Nuestra Señora de Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga and the Presidio del Loreto founded in 1720 on the Garcitas Creek in Victoria County.

In 1731, after the arrival of the Canary Islanders, Mission San Antonio de Valero retained full title to all its lands, including those which now comprise the HemisFair Park area. In 1774, the Adaesanos, outcasts/refugees from the Spanish outpost of Los Adaes in East Texas, were ordered to San Antonio. They were allowed to select any lands that did not interfere with the land already belonging to the settlers or Native Americans.



Acequia Systems of San Antonio
from 1997 Archaeological Survey Report, No. 249,
by Edgar D. Johnson, I. Wayne Cox, and C. Britt Bousman

In the 18th century, this area was known as the *Barrio del Alamo*, a small community of former mission Indians, *Adaesanos*, Spanish settlers, military soldiers, and their families. The earliest structures were small *jacales*, (vertical wood posts with daub chinking and frequently horizontal lathe) or adobe huts.

By the late 18th century, citizens began to pressure for the use of the underutilized property of Mission San Antonio de Valero. The Adaesanos, who had settled near Valero petitioned for the unused lands (Chabot 1932:60). In 1793, the missions began the process of secularization due to their failure to convert and "civilize" the many Native American groups. The *labor de afuera*, the lands which today comprise HemisFair, were granted to the Adaesanos and other mission residents.

The 19th century brought a different settlement pattern to the neighborhood. In 1856, the corporate limits of the city were divided into four wards covering 36 square miles. The HemisFair Park area falls within the boundaries of Ward 4, which included all of the land east of the San Antonio River and south of Commerce Street to the city's eastern and southern limits. In the mid-to-late 19th century, the area was predominately German in population. Other ethnicities included Polish settlers and African Americans. In fact, more African Americans lived in Ward 4 (19.9%) than any other area, and many settled in the "Baptist Settlement," within the present-day HemisFair Park area.



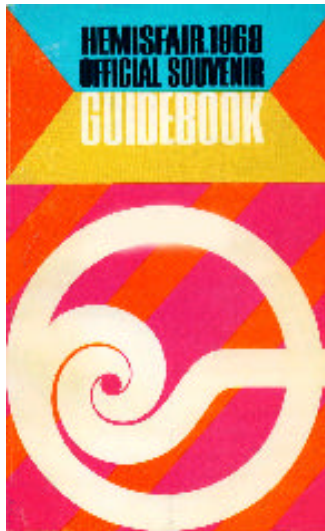
Pre-HemisFair site neighborhood structures



Composite Sanborn Map detail, partial HemisFair Area 1911-1951

A network of streets linked adjacent neighborhoods, criss-crossing present-day HemisFair Park. These include Water Street, Wyoming Street, Matagorda Street, Labor Street, South Street, North Street, Rusk Street, Alamo Street, Indianola Street, and Durango Street. Residential homes in the "settlement style" and commercial businesses of the earliest settlers of San Antonio were located along these nodes.

By the mid-20th century, many of the residential areas around the city's urban core had deteriorated considerably. These areas included the neighborhoods in and around HemisFair. To address decline in cities' centers across the United States, the Federal Urban Renewal Program was enacted in 1949 to remove inadequate housing and stimulate community development. Cities were given large amounts of federal money to purchase areas that were in decline, which were then sold to private developers for a "few cents on the dollar" to construct new, improved housing or develop community projects. Some 15 years later, the Urban Renewal Program would be utilized to develop the HemisFair site.



Official HemisFair Guidebook



Los Indios voladores

Significance of Fair to San Antonio

HemisFair was the first officially designated international exposition in the Southwestern United States. Held from April 6 through October 6, 1968, the fair commemorated the 250th anniversary of the founding of San Antonio. The “Confluence of Civilizations in the Americas” was the overall theme, with more than 30 participating nations. HemisFair ‘68 attracted more than 6.3 million visitors and focused international attention on the city and state.

Actions Leading Up to HemisFair

The fair was conceived in 1959 by local business leaders to celebrate the cultural heritage shared by San Antonio and its neighbor nations of Latin America. Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez endorsed the idea. Financing for HemisFair included a combination of public funding and private underwriting. Public support came from the United States Housing and Home Finance Agency, the Urban Renewal Agency, the Texas State Legislature, and the U.S. Congress. By 1962, a local nonprofit organization (501c3) was formed to deal with the conception of potential plans for the exposition. A theme began to solidify: “Fair of the Americas” and more specifically, “Confluence of Civilizations in the Americas.” A nonprofit corporation was formed called the San Antonio Fair, Incorporated. Jerome K. Harris was the “father of the fair idea,” while William R. Sinkin was the first president. Henry B. Zachry was named chairman of the board, and in December 1964, Marshall Steves became president.

Once organizers were on board with the concept of the world exposition, the main task became finding a suitable site for the fair’s setting. Site location began through the organization of the Site Selection Committee, headed by Chamber of Commerce President James M. Gaines. Sites went under review in 1963. A 90 acre site on the southeastern edge of the central San Antonio Business District was chosen.

An Urban Renewal designation secured federal funds to transform the old neighborhood into an exposition site. Twenty-six banks in San Antonio jointly agreed to pay for a feasibility study for the fair. They also started to plan for underwriting the operating costs of a fair. The fair project required seed money to get under way. The banks provided financing in the form of a loan, which was secured by the pledges from the San Antonio business community. In less than four months, the underwriting goal - total coverage for a \$4.5 million loan - was oversubscribed by a million dollars. What began as a lofty dream became a reality on April 6, 1968 when HemisFair opened to the public.



Aerial view - HemisFair site



L-R: HemisFair novelty bag, Traditional dress, Water show

HemisFair was singularly effective as a medium for social and cultural exchange and progress. The city acquired assets valued at \$12 million in buildings, waterways, and landscaping when it was transferred to the City from San Antonio Fair, Inc. (*Ordinance No. 36856*). The area was to remain for public use as a municipal center, an extension of the convention facilities, city offices, education, and park facilities.

Post HemisFair Actions

Although 129 of the original historic structures were recommended to be saved and incorporated into HemisFair, the total number eventually saved was 24. At the end of the fair, the homes reverted to City ownership to remain as a reminder of San Antonio's architectural heritage, and were later designated historic by the 1972 San Antonio Historic Survey and the Texas State Historic Commission Survey. In addition, these same 24 buildings plus a few structures built for HemisFair were designated as historically significant (HS) and/or historically exceptional (HE) by the San Antonio City Council under Ordinance No. 64539 and 64540 on February 12, 1987 (*see HemisFair Site Index, pg. 17*).

The site still contains the 24 historic structures, along with several of the structures built specifically for the fair, which are currently in use by a variety of occupants. These include the Federal Courthouse and Training Facility, the Institute of Texan Cultures, Tower of the Americas, and portion of the Instituto de México. Two educational institutions - the Texas A&M University Engineering Extension Service, and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México have also been added to the site since the fair.

Prior to the fair, the City conveyed approximately 5 acres of the site to the federal government for the Federal Courthouse/Training facility and 13.1 acres to the State for the Texas Pavilion. In the mid 1970s, the federal government acquired additional acreage for the Federal Office Building, and later, in the 1980s, the State was deeded additional acreage for a permanent downtown campus. Although the entire HemisFair Park is approximately 78 acres, currently, the

Pre-HemisFair Structure



Instituto de México



Texas A&M Univ. Extension Service



Downtown All-Around Playground



Convention Center access path

City of San Antonio owns only about 50 acres, of which, over 30 acres is occupied by the Convention Center complex. Approximately two-thirds of the remaining land is owned by the State of Texas, through UTSA, with the remaining one-third owned by federal government.

The park was renovated in 1985 and several additions were made to the park at that time including cascading waterfalls, fountains and a water feature adjacent to the Tower of the Americas. In 1990, a children's playground was added, built entirely with volunteer labor.

In 1999, the expansion of the Convention Center, the park site's primary anchor, required the removal of many water features. Due to its massive physical size, the Center impacted both vehicular parking options and pedestrian access, and general movement and orientation within the park became more limited. With the anticipated level of proposed Convention Center and hotel development necessary to accommodate growth expectations for the San Antonio visitor industry over the next decades, it has become increasingly necessary to coordinate future expansion

needs and address their impact on the immediate and surrounding HemisFair Park site.

The majority of the historic structures used during the HemisFair event have required intensive, continued maintenance. Those structures that have remained vacant for much of that time have continued in a state of disrepair, which in recent years, has become a critical financial consideration for the City. The tenants for some of the historic structures include the Amaya Deli, Office of the Bexar County Master Gardeners Association, KIA International Jewelry, the administrative offices of the Instituto de México, and several City of San Antonio administrative offices. The Tower of the Americas structure, the "crown jewel" of HemisFair achievement, has continued to operate since HemisFair '68, however, in recent years, it has also required a comprehensive maintenance program.

With the comprehensive redevelopment of the Tower, along with future Convention Center and hotel expansion, the HemisFair Park site is poised to play a significant role in the future development of downtown San Antonio, for the next several decades.



James Sweeney House



OK Bar



Water feature



Solis House



Espinoza House

